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Duplicate



Mr. SAMPSON'S
THANKSGIVING SERMON,
FEBRUARY 19, 1795.



DISCOURSE



CHARLES G. BERNARD

1840

A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

FEBRUARY 19, 1795;

BEING

**THE DAY OF
NATIONAL THANKSGIVING.**

By EZRA SAMPSON, R

PASTOR OF THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY IN PLYMPTON.

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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

FEBRUARY 10 1793



THE ART OF NATIONAL THANKSGIVING

BY T. R. SAMPSON

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 7—10, 11, 12.

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy Father, and he will shew thee: thy Elders, and they will tell thee.—He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness: He led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him.

IN this part of the Song of Moses, there is a very sublime and beautiful representation of the tender and continual care of God over the nation of Israel. Moses called upon his people to remember the days of old—To look back to former generations, and consider the wonderful operations of Providence in favour of their ancestors. He exhorted the younger people to inquire of the fathers and elders of the nation; who would inform them what great and astonishing things divine Providence had

had done for them, within the compass of their own memory: And proceeded, in the lofty and figurative language of eastern poetry, to describe the assiduous care of Providence over Israel, while passing through the wilderness. *He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness. He led him about.* This was done in a very extraordinary and miraculous manner: for the pillar of cloud, in which was a visible display of the divine glory, stood over the tabernacle that was pitched in the midst of the congregation. When the bright and glorious cloud moved, the tabernacle and the whole camp moved also: and, when the cloud stood still, the people halted. In this manner, God led them about, as it were, by a visible hand. *He instructed him.* This he did by a course of miraculous providences, and by the laws and ordinances, moral, ceremonial and political, which were given to Moses on mount Sinai, and, by him, communicated to the people. *He kept him as the apple of his eye.* No similitude could be more expressive than this of the tenderest care. The apple or sight of the eye is exceedingly delicate and easily hurt; and being of singular use and importance to the body, is guarded with peculiar care. And such a tender care had God over his people, as one has for the very sight of his eye. *As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings,*

wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him. The eagle has been called the royal bird. Eagles are remarkable for the largeness of their size, their strength and their courage. They have a most tender care of their brood—cover them with their extensive wings, and will courageously defend them against any assaults: and, in order to teach and encourage their young to fly, will sometimes (it is said) take them up on their own wings, and bear them aloft in the air. And, in like manner, the Lord protected, and fed and led his people. That this description of the care of God over Israel (though highly figurative and poetical) is strictly true, will be found by reading the history of the remarkable divine protection which that people experienced; especially from about the time of their leaving Egypt, to the period of their establishment in the land of Canaan. To assert that there is, in many instances, a great resemblance between the divine dispensations toward the nation of Israel, and the course of Providence respecting our own nation, would be repeating what has been said, perhaps, a thousand times before. And, indeed, this resemblance cannot escape the notice of any one who has attentively read the Old Testament history; and is also acquainted with the history of the first settlement of our own country—its changes and remarkable progress,

progress, and the constant protection of Heaven that has been afforded to it. We ourselves, surely, as well as the people of Israel, have cause to remember the days of old, and to call to mind the years of former generations; when our forefathers, escaping from the hand of oppression, came into a desert land; even a waste, howling wilderness. We have cause, with lively gratitude to God, to call to mind the history of his tender care over them; who, in a course of marvellous providences, led them about, instructed them, spread abroad over them the wings of his holy protection, as an eagle broods her young; and even guarded them as one guardeth the apple of his eye.—And indeed has not the *present* generation witnessed a wonderful course of providences, in which, *the God of Jeshurun hath been riding upon the Heavens for our help, and in his excellency on the skies?* Ask your fathers, young people! and they will shew you—Your elders, and they will tell you—Read the history of the American revolution, and it will inform you—Observe the course of events that have taken place since, and it will teach you—that God hath done great things for us of this generation; whereof we ought to be glad, and which call for the most lively sentiments of gratitude. But, while we take only a general and cursory survey of events that have long been past, it behoves us, at this time, to pay a
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more particular attention to some of a recent date. Called upon, as we are, by that great and good man, who united all hearts, and led forth our armies to victory, in the day of war; and, with no less prudence and patriotism, now guides our public councils.—Who, if ever a man was worthy of that honorable appellation, may justly be called the FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY!—Called upon by him to set apart and observe this day, as a day of public Thanksgiving, our thoughts will properly fix upon those signal divine favours, which are mentioned in his proclamation.

But exhorts us “to render our sincere and hearty thanks to the great Ruler of Nations, for the manifold and signal mercies, which distinguish our lot as a nation; particularly for the possession of Constitutions of Government, which unite, and, by their union, establish liberty with order.” The governments of the world have usually been founded in conquest or usurpation: and the people have received the charter of their privileges (if indeed they had any) as a matter of grace from their rulers, in whom the supreme and sovereign power was supposed to reside. It has been the distinguished happy lot of our nation, that the people have had “opportunities, deliberately and peaceably, without fraud, violence or surprise, of entering into original, ex-

plicit and solemn compacts with each other; and of forming constitutions of government for themselves and posterity." By these constitutions the distinct powers of government are separated and balanced. Our rulers derive their authority from the people—are responsible to them for their official conduct—are punishable, if they abuse their trust—and, as to most of them, their delegated power expires, at fixed periods: when they mingle again among the general mass of the people; who may either renew their political existence, or elect others in their stead. Under these favourable circumstances, if the people themselves are intelligent, vigilant and virtuous, there will be no considerable danger of internal incroachments upon their civil and constituted rights. But the state constitutions (however excellent are some of them; and ours, in particular, has been admired, for the wisdom of its contrivance, in different quarters of the world) needed a common bond of union, to preserve order, and to direct the strength, and draw forth the resources of the nation, to a single point. Through the want of this uniting and energetic principle, a great degree of public distress, was, for some years felt. The states, united only in name, were *practically* divided; and pursued opposite interests. Public and private credit was, in a manner, lost. Money, which is the sinews of business,

ness, was partly drained from the country, and partly hoarded, through want of mutual confidence. Husbandry, manufactures and commerce, languished: The industrious could find no employ. The means of paying private debts or public charges, were sought in vain: and the sale of lands, as well as of their stock and produce, would, sometimes, but little more than defray the expense of public auction. These troubles being generally felt, and the true causes of them *not* so generally perceived, a spirit of bitterness against government naturally ensued: and the whole country was threatned with horrible scenes of anarchy and desolation. The bitter experience of those evils, and the gloomy prospect of evils still greater, led THE PEOPLE, by their delegates, to frame and adopt an efficient, federal government; which should take care of the *general* interests of the nation: while the state governments continue their sovereignty, as to those *local* matters, that pertain merely to individual states. Since which auspicious period, the unspeakable advantages of public credit are experienced.—Agriculture, manufactures and commerce, have greatly flourished; and our nation, the honour of which was brought to the dust, has been rapidly rising in wealth and respectability. In the mean time, every citizen makes part of the sovereign people;—is subject only to law, which he himself

has

has virtually consented to, and enjoys all the freedom that is consistent with a state of society. And that we are thus distinguished from the other nations of the earth, by enjoying constitutions of government, which connect liberty with order—mildness with energy—is to be ascribed to the Alwise Disposer of events : and calls for our sincere ascriptions of praise to him. *He hath not dealt so with any nation. Praise ye the Lord !*

Another distinguishing and eminent favour, for which the proclamation calls upon us to render our thanks to the great Ruler of nations, is " our exemption hitherto from foreign war, and the prospect of the continuance of that exemption." War is among the greatest calamities that can befall a people. It cuts off the young men—the flower of the land, by the sword. It creates an enormous public debt. And infinitely more pernicious still are its moral consequences. It encourages the spirit of speculation and knavery, by presenting the most favourable opportunities for the crafty and knavish to make a prey of the honest and unsuspecting. It introduces idleness, profaneness, intemperance and other camp-vices among the whole body of the people : and naturally tends, in general, to destroy morality, and to introduce a universal corruption of manners.—Indeed, the existing war in Europe has, in some instances,

stances, been conducted with uncommon ferocity, and has produced most dreadful scenes of slaughter. The tear of humanity falls, in reflecting upon the ravages there of the sword among the human race—*Garments rolled in blood!*—myriads slain! and many thousands of virtuous and amiable families rendered houseless and wretched. Happily separated as we are from those countries by a widely extended ocean, it would be folly bordering upon madness, voluntarily to become a party in their wars.—We heartily detest and execrate the despotic principles, which have led the princes of Europe to combine and wage war against the French people; and thankfully acknowledge the righteousness of divine Providence, in *pouring contempt* upon that abominable confederacy. We approve and applaud the original principles of the French Revolution,* rejoice in their victories, and devoutly wish that their astonishing efforts to vindicate

* An entire approbation of the original principles of the French Revolution is very consistent with a just abhorrence of those ferocious and bloody measures, into which the nation has been precipitated by certain demagogues; who, while they professed themselves to be the first champions of liberty, were, in fact, exercising the most horrible tyranny.—Americans, surely, at this period, will not attempt to justify the vandalism, the assassinations and the promiscuous executions, by the guillotine, fustion-boats, &c. which have been tolerated in France: since the French people themselves do now execrate some of those enormities, and are wishing to consign the authors of them to eternal infamy. It is, however, a question which seriously concerns the princes and their adherents, who have combined against France, Whether most of the innocent blood, that has been shed there, since the period of their wicked combination, will not, in a measure, be ultimately chargeable upon themselves. *The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now thou art cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood.*

The Almighty denouncing Cain.

vindicate their own rights, may be crowned with ultimate success.—The hand of united America has been cheerfully opened to their brethren of the French republic, in affording them every necessary article of sustenance : and can the voice of unprejudiced reason demand more ?

Our nation, surely, could not have stretched its arm over the ocean, and, in any considerable measure, have benefited the French cause by the sword of war. The nation is young—already in debt—bearing still, as it were, the marks and scars of a late bloody and expensive war ; and its federal government but lately organized. Under these circumstances, a war at *best* would have been very calamitous ; and possibly might have hazarded even our political *existence* as an independent nation. When we read or hear of the blood-stained fields and smouldering towns of Europe, and the horrible ravages, which the sword has there made over fair and fertile countries ; great cause have we to thank the God of our salvation, that our nation has been hitherto exempted from this horrible scourge : especially, when it is considered that war, but lately, seemed inevitable. *The snare is broken, and we are escaped : praise ye the Lord !* Pray for the continued peace of America ! Peace be in thy borders, and prosperity in all thy dwellings !

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Another divine favour, which we are directed to remember in our ascriptions of praise to God, this day, is, "the seasonable controul, which has been given to a spirit of disorder, in the suppression of the late insurrection." The three western counties of Pennsylvania, (*Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon*) under colour of opposing an excise on the manufacture of ardent spirits, shook off their allegiance and revolted from government. The contagion of their example seemed to be spreading into other counties and other states: and if, indeed, the Union was not threatned with danger, there was, at least, cause to fear that so formidable an insurrection could not have been suppressed, without the shedding of much blood.

Even admitting the supposition that those deluded people had cause to complain of some unequal burdens (which, I conceive, does by no means appear) they must, notwithstanding, have been very criminal to rise up in rebellion against the laws of their country. An essential principle of a republican government professing equal rights, is, that the majority of the people shall rule the minority. And, if any class or district of a republican nation conceive themselves to be unequally burdened, there are constitutional modes of seeking redress: and even, should

should ~~these~~ be tried and fail, it becomes them as good citizens, to submit quietly to the general will of the nation expressed by the voice of its representatives. For, when a district or a minor part of the nation rises in opposition to the major part, it is practically rejecting republican principles, and saying that the *few* shall rule the *many*. That such an insurrection, wrong and criminal in its principles, to say the *least*, and formidable in its appearance, has been seasonably suppressed, and without any bloody conflict, is truly a matter of rejoicing and of praise to God. *He stills the tumult of the people.* Nor ought we to be unmindful of those excellent men, whom he hath eminently qualified, and used as signal instruments of saving and blessing our country. We owe it, under kind Providence, to the firmness of our federal executive—to the singularly prudent and benevolent measures of our beloved President, aided and supported by illustrious bands of patriots, both in and out of Congress—that the lowering tempest of war has passed away from over our heads, and that the spirit of insurgency has met with a seasonable and effectual check.

And, while we are careful “to be duly thankful to the Author of all good for the prosperous course of our affairs, both public and private,” we should,

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in the mean time, remember that the men, who prudently and faithfully administer our government, are the immediate instruments of the public prosperity. *Think upon them, our God, for good, according to all they have done for this people.* It is our devout wish that "the blessings, which we possess or ask for ourselves, may be imparted to the whole family of mankind." May the sceptre of tyranny wound every hand that holds it. May genuine liberty, which is always attended with order, visit every clime. And may all the nations of the earth, know and praise, in its purity, that divine and benevolent system of religion, which was revealed by Jesus Christ: and which, while it immediately directs to the future and better world, is exceedingly conducive both to public and private happiness in the present: by promoting civilization, courtesy and sweetness of manners—peace on earth and good will among men. Ever may the wings of Emmanuel overspread our own land. May we duly estimate the immense value of the blessings both civil and religious, which we enjoy. May we seek the continuance of these blessings, by not abusing them, by our gratitude for them, and by a correspondent conduct, as citizens and as men. *Happy are thou, united America! How goodly are thy tents!*

tents! Who is like unto thee, O People, saved by the Lord!

The revolution and consequent happiness and prosperity of our country may produce effects, which finally will deeply interest the whole world. And, possibly, we are an interesting spectacle to angels and other benevolent spirits; who wish to see the earth delivered from the state of oppression, under which it has groaned almost from the beginning. If indeed the spirits of the just made perfect have now any knowledge and concern about the affairs of this mortal life, our pious and venerable forefathers, who to enjoy the sweets of liberty, came into a waste, howling wilderness, might be represented (at least in imagination) as looking down from the sublime seats of paradise, and addressing their numerous offspring in language like this.

"Our Children!

"You are reaping the precious harvest that our toil and hardships planted. You enjoy a goodly land and well balanced governments, which guard your civil and religious rights. BORN FREE AND EQUAL, you call no man Master upon earth. " Your laws

laws and your lawgivers proceed from yourselves: and if you are not happy, it will be your own fault."* Love your country, and seek its peace. Regard the sacred laws of hospitality. Cordially receive and cherish the *stranger*, who escapes to you from the hand of oppression; knowing that your fathers fled hither from the oppressor's scourge, and were strangers in the land. Yet beware of too close a connection with the vicious and debauched nations of the old world. Beware of servilely copying their examples, their customs and manners. *Come out from among them and be ye separate.* Know your own dignity; and let your national character (like your governments) be *original*. Take heed lest you be corrupted by the wealth and luxuries, which will flow in upon you from the numerous channels of commerce. Distinguish yourselves, as becomes the republican character, by simplicity of manners and living. Encourage the tiller of the ground and the useful mechanic. "Reckon the necessity of labour *not* among the *curse*s, but the *blessings* of life." Honour the men, who, with their own hands, maintain their families, and raise up children, who are inured to toil, and capable of defending their country.†

* Dr. Ramsay.

† Ibid.

Train up your children in useful knowledge and virtue. Instruct their hands to labour : learn them to be patient of toil—to endure hardness and to be orderly and frugal. *Mark them, who cause divisions.* Avoid discord and faction, which have been the bane of former republics ; and cherish and support a reverence for government, and cultivate union among yourselves. Commit the direction of your public affairs always to prudent and able men, of uncorrupted morals ; *who fear God and hate covetousness.* Watch your rulers, but not maliciously. Examine public measures with care and with candour. Be grateful to your wise and virtuous rulers, who like guardian angels, have watched over and promoted the public good. *Render to all their dues ; tribute, to whom tribute is due ; custom, to whom custom ; fear, to whom fear ; honour, to whom honour.* Cultivate justice, both public and private. “ Universal justice is universal interest.” Shun idleness, prodigality and the poisoned cup of intemperance. “ Practise industry, frugality, moderation and the whole lovely train of republican virtues.” Establish among yourselves “ the habits of sobriety, order, morality and piety.” Give heed, lest your just admiration of a
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great and gallant people should lead you to favour their atheistical philosophy. *Know the God of your fathers.* Reverence his sabbaths; and support and observe the *christian* institutions. So will you rise to a high rank among the nations; and your latter days will be blessed."

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